Resolution on the EU strategy for the third Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

2008/2578(RSP) - 22/05/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 21 May 2008, the European Parliament adopted, by 406 votes favour to 10 with 3 abstentions, a resolution on the EU strategy for the third Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention in Riga, Latvia from 11 to 13 June 2008. The resolution had been tabled for consideration in plenary by the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety. Parliament urges the EU to take a leading, transparent and constructive role in the negotiations and to contribute actively to the long-term strategic plan of the Convention. This includes the elaboration of a possibly wider scope for the Convention so that sustainable development in all its dimensions is covered by the same principles of transparency, participation and accountability. Members believe that MOP-3 will provide a good opportunity both to review the progress which has been achieved so far and to reflect on future challenges. Securing effective implementation of the Convention should be the key priority for the future.

The Commission and Member States are urged to ensure that the decisions taken at MOP-3 further implement and develop the Convention, and that synergies are created between the Aarhus Convention and the relevant multilateral environmental agreements. They are also urged to ensure that:

-the long-term strategic plan includes provisions to increase the public's awareness of their rights and responsibilities under the Aarhus Convention;

-MOP-3 clarifies the conditions for the entry into force of the amendment on GMOs adopted in 2005 and any future amendments to the Convention, with a view to securing their early implementation;

-predictable, stable and adequate financial arrangements are adopted for the Convention;

-the compliance mechanism is further improved, on the basis of the experience gained;

-work on access to justice continues by ensuring that public authorities at all levels of government are fully aware of their obligations under the Aarhus Convention, and by encouraging public authorities to allocate the human, financial and material resources needed to fulfil their obligations;

-parties take the necessary legal and budgetary measures to guarantee that the third pillar of the Convention is fully implemented, effective remedies are provided for access to justice, and access to procedures is fair, equitable, timely and not prohibitively expensive;

-a Working Group is set up to assess the implementation of the public participation pillar of the Convention, if necessary leading to proposals for further improving the Convention.

Parliament goes on to urge the resumption of the legislative work aimed at adopting a legislative instrument which implements Article 9 of the Convention within the European Union, since this last

remaining pillar has not been fully transposed into Community law. It welcomes the plan by the Commission to organise a conference on access to justice in June 2008 in order to give further impetus to the legislative work within the Community. It is also important to enhance synergies and links with other relevant international organisations and Conventions, in particular the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. However, the Aarhus Convention is the appropriate forum for deliberating on horizontal principles of public access to information, participation and access to justice in environmental matters. The Commission is asked to set the public authorities in the Member States a good example by implementing the Aarhus Convention in a rigorous manner.

Parliament urges the countries which have not yet done so to ratify the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on pollutant release and transfer registers, and to encourage other countries outside the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe to become parties to the Convention.

Lastly, it believes that Members of the European Parliament who are part of the EC delegation have an essential contribution to make, and therefore expects that they will have access to EU coordination meetings without speaking rights in Riga.